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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1572  
RHMFIS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000431

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM BO

SUBJECT: CHARGE MEETS 16-YEAR-OLD FACING PRISON FOR  
PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVITIES

REF: A. MINSK 228

- 1B. MINSK 400
- 1C. MINSK 430
- 1D. MINSK 352

Classified By: DCM Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

11. (C) On May 22, Charge met with 16-year-old Anastasiya Palazhanka, one of seven Malady Front (MF) members who face up to two years in prison for "running an unregistered organization" (ref A). Like her four MF compatriots with whom Charge had visited earlier (refs B and C), Palazhanka expressed her thanks to the U.S. and the Embassy for our efforts to persuade the GOB to release Belarusian political prisoners and drop criminal charges against the MF activists (ref D). When Charge pledged that the Embassy would be present at her May 28 trial, the youth leader expressed her deepest gratitude. Foreseeing that prosecutors would seek to discredit the MF activists, Palazhanka predicted that the international attention would ensure that historians would record the truth about her and her compatriots.

12. (C) Palazhanka also credited the United States for the release of MF founder Pavel Severinets and opposition politician Nikolay Statkevich earlier that day. She elaborated that these releases were important not only for moral reasons, but also because Severinets would play a key role in coordinating MF's participation in de facto opposition coalition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich's "For Freedom" movement. When asked about Milinkevich's efforts on behalf of MF, the youth leader diplomatically replied, "Well, it is often said that MF supports Milinkevich more than Milinkevich supports MF." Nevertheless, Palazhanka emphasized her organization's unequivocal support for Milinkevich as the rightful leader of Belarus' democratic opposition movement. She also requested the USG to pressure top regime officials to begin a dialogue with Milinkevich as a necessary step toward any improved relations.

Comment

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13. (C) We were extremely impressed with this young opposition leader's extraordinary courage, eloquence, and poise. Perhaps the regime also recognizes these qualities in her and is thus willing to risk international condemnation by persecuting a minor for peaceful, pro-democracy activities.

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